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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000520

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WHA FOR A/S SHANNON, DASDUDDY, AND DMCCARTHY, WHA/BSC FOR BARNES, FRIEDMAN, AND BLAKENEY NEA/IR FOR HWOOSTER, S/CT FOR VIRGINIA PALMER AND ARNOLD SIERRA, NSC FOR JUAN ZARATE AND JOSE CARDENAS, FBI FOR CTD IRAN-HIZBALLAH UNIT AND OIO AMERICAS UNIT

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TAGS: PTER PREL PGOV KJUS AR FBI

SUBJECT: ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT WELCOMES AMIA DECISION  
PRIVATELY, BUT QUIET PUBLICLY

REF: A. 1. BUENOS AIRES 422 2) BUENOS AIRES 375 3)  
BUENOS AIRES 312  
1B. 4) BUENOS AIRES 263 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR E. ANTHONY WAYNE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 15, Interpol Executive Committee (EC) recommended by consensus the issuance of Red Notices against five Iranian officials and one Hizballah - Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) leader wanted in connection with the July 18, 1994 suicide bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA), but turned down the GoA's request against three other former top Iranian officials, including former President Hashemi Rafsanjani. Apart from press reports quoting AMIA Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman as saying "We won", GoA reaction so far has been relatively quiet. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Luis Cappagli told DCM the

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GOA did not intend to issue a press statement. He added that the GOA fully expects the GOI to appeal the decision, but that the unanimity of the EC decision would have a very favorable impact on a future vote by the Interpol General Assembly in November. In a separate conversation, Vice Foreign Minister Garcia Moritan called Ambassador to express thanks for USG assistance in rallying Interpol EC support and the judge in the case similarly expressed his sincere appreciation for help.

¶2. (SBU) Local press coverage has depicted the Interpol decision as a victory for the GoA, with two articles criticizing the USG decision to support the EC's recommendation not to publish the Red Notices for top Iranian officials. Reactions from the Jewish community were mixed, with leaders from AMIA and the Delegation of Israeli and Argentine Associations (DAIA) applauding the announcement but expressing disappointment regarding Interpol's recommendation to issue only six of the nine Red Notices. Meanwhile, on March 16th First Lady Cristina Kirchner and four government ministers attended a ceremony commemorating the 15th anniversary of the terrorist bombing of the Israeli Embassy in which Israeli officials repeatedly blamed Iran and Hezbollah for the attack. Although President Kirchner did not attend the ceremony, he stated that the bombing was "an attack on the people of Argentina" and stressed that the GOA would not back down on its commitment to investigate the case

to the very end. End Summary.

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Interpol Decision  
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¶3. (SBU) On March 15, Interpol Executive Committee (EC) approved by consensus the issuance of Red Notices for six of the nine AMIA subjects as recommended by Interpol's Legal Department. A senior GOA source reported that the only EC representative who did not attend the March 15 vote was the Brazilian representative, given possible GOB concerns over complicating its relations with Iran. The Red Notices were approved for five Iranian officials and one Hizballah - Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) leader wanted in connection with the July 18, 1994 AMIA suicide bombing, which killed 85 people and wounded more than 150. The approved applications included former Minister of Intelligence and current Assembly of Experts member Ali Fallahijan, former IRGC Commander and current Expediency Council member Mohsen Rezai, former Quds Force leader and current Deputy Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi, former Iranian Embassy (Buenos Aires) Cultural Attaché Mohsen Rabbani, and former third secretary of the Iranian Embassy Ahmed Reza Asghari (a.k.a. Mohsen Randjbaran). The report named Hizballah terrorist leader Imad Mughniah as well. As expected, Interpol's EC denied the GOA's request to issue Red Notices for Iran's former President and current chairman of the Expediency Council Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, former Foreign Minister and current Khamenei advisor Ali Akbar Velayati, former Ambassador of Iran (Buenos Aires) Hadi Soleimanpour. Interpol EC decided against issuing a Red Notice against Soleimanpour based on a lack of adequate new evidence. Interpol's EC justified its decision not to issue Red Notices against Rafsanjani and Velayati because Interpol's mandate specifically prohibits it from interfering in the internal political affairs of other

countries. We understand that the Red Notices will be published on April 1 if Iran does not appeal the decision by March 31. Iran's Charge in Buenos Aires, Mohsen Baharvand, said the Iranian government would appeal the decision and blames "USG political pressure" for the decision. Should Iran appeal the decision, Interpol will hold the Red Notices in abeyance until the matter can be voted on by Interpol's General Assembly in November.

¶4. (C) GoA reaction so far has been relatively quiet; Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman's publicly stated that the Interpol decision indicated strong support for the GoA investigation. But the press carries no other GoA official reaction to the Interpol announcement. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Luis Cappagli told DCM that senior leadership in the MFA and Interior Ministries were very pleased with the outcome, but that the GOA did not intend to issue a press statement. He added that the GOA fully expects the GOI to appeal the decision, but that the unanimity of the EC decision and the Legal Department's recommendation would favorably impact a future vote by the Interpol General Assembly in November. In a separate conversation, Vice Foreign Minister Garcia Moritan called Ambassador to thank him for USG assistance in rallying Interpol EC support. He specifically expressed thanks to Secretary Rice and Under Secretary Burns. The investigating judge in the case,

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Rodolfo Canicoba Corral, also told Ambassador how much he appreciated U.S. support in the runup to Lyon. He said he would like to get all the Red Notices issued, but understood U.S. concerns.

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Press Mostly Positive, But Critics Accuse USG of "Short-Sightedness" for leaving out Top Iranian Officials  
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¶5. (SBU) The Argentine media has given prominent coverage to Interpol's ruling, largely depicting it as a victory for the GoA, especially in light of Interpol's decision to rescind

Argentina's Red Notices in September 2005. Press reports commonly describe Interpol's unanimous decision as reaffirming the integrity and legitimacy of Argentina's claim, even if it does not make certain that the bombing was masterminded by the Iranian intelligence apparatus and Hezbollah. One opinion piece cited progress on the AMIA case as a direct outcome of improved U.S.-Argentine relations, while others criticized the U.S. decision to support the EC's recommendation not to publish the Red Notices for top Iranian officials. One article accuses the USG of "short-sightedness" for prioritizing concerns that the USG would be setting a precedent for rival governments to seek the extradition of U.S. leaders by voting in favor of issuing a red notice against former president Rafsanjani. Another alleges that the arrest of top Iranian officials would be inconvenient for Washington's Middle East strategy, specifically describing Rafsanjani as a "key politician" in U.S. efforts to counterweigh Ahmadinejad.

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Mixed Reaction from the Jewish Community  
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¶6. (SBU) Reactions to the Interpol decision from the Argentine Jewish community have been mixed. Luis Grynwald, President of the AMIA, and Angel Schindel, Vice-president of the Delegation of Israeli and Argentine Associations (DAIA), have applauded the announcement, stating that the unanimous verdict proves the strength of GoA's case. Grynwald and Schindel both expressed disappointment regarding Interpol's recommendation to issue only six of the nine Red Notices, and maintained that the GoA still has the option to appeal. They stated that the decision was not a surprise, claiming that Interpol never pursues high level officials. A few press reports, on the other hand, indicated that family members of victims of the bombing have criticized Interpol's ruling as insufficient, since it does not include all nine suspects.

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Kirchner: Israeli Embassy Bombing was "An Attack on the People of Argentina"  
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¶7. (C) The Interpol decision was made on the eve of the 15th anniversary of the 1992 bombing at the Israeli Embassy which killed 29 people. On March 16, First Lady Cristina Kirchner, Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana, Defense Minister Nilda Garre, Justice Minister Alberto Iribarne, Education Minister Daniel Filmus, and Buenos Aires Mayor Jorge Telerman attended a ceremony commemorating the attack. In addition, the Israeli Ambassador Rafael Eldad, Israel's MFA Secretary General Aaron Abramovich, and the Israeli Ambassador to the UN Dan Gillerman who lost his wife in the attack, delivered speeches during the ceremony and blamed the Iranian government and Hezbollah for the attack. They, along with a representative from the Jewish community, mentioned Interpol's recommendation to issue Red Notices in the 1994 AMIA bombing, describing the decision as a sign of "international affirmation" for the pursuit of truth and justice. FM Taiana also spoke at the ceremony, noting that the Argentine Supreme Court decided in 2006 that there was no statute of limitations for the case. He also emphasized that the GOA will continue to pursue every individual involved in the planning and execution of the bombing. President Kirchner did not attend the ceremony, but expressed his solidarity with the Jewish community from Patagonia three hours earlier and in an indirect reference to his wife, noted that he was sending a "penguin" to the event. (Note: Kirchner often refers to himself and his inner circle as "penguins.") Kirchner stated that the Israeli Embassy bombing was "an attack on the people of Argentina" and stressed that the GOA would not back down on its commitment to investigate the case to the very end. FM Taiana reiterated this sentiment in his speech. After the ceremony, Vice Minister of Defense Ocampo told Ambassador that Argentina is united behind the effort to seek justice in the 1992 and 1994 bombings, stating "We're all one." Later that

day, the press quoted the Ambassador, who described Taiana's remarks as "a clear stance against terrorism" and that the U.S. and Argentina share a common goal in fighting terrorism.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) Iran's likely decision to appeal Interpol's EC recommendation will, ironically, keep the issue alive in the Argentine press in the runup to a November Interpol General Assembly vote. Kirchner's statement that the Embassy bombing was an attack on the people of Argentina was surprising, as many in and out of the GOA have often stated that the attack, as well as the AMIA bombing, were only directed at the Jewish community. Although the GOA's public rhetoric at the commemoration ceremony for the attack on the Israeli Embassy is positive, it remains to be seen whether the GOA will follow through in pursuing justice for the attack.

Nevertheless, Christina's attendance at the event and her upcoming visit to Venezuela on March 23-24 to meet with the Jewish community there, foreshadows a likely Presidential bid by the First Lady and signals to Caracas that Argentina will remain firm in its commitment to pursue justice in the AMIA case despite Venezuela's alliance with Iran. Unlike the Chavez event, the ceremony was televised in its entirety.

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